

# **TED ANKARA COLLEGE FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL**

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#### **EXTENDED ESSAY**

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**Research Question: What is the role of women in James Joyce's *Dubliners* and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*?**

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## Abstract

This extended essay is an investigation of the protagonist female characters in both James Joyce's *Dubliners* and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. The research question revolves around unwed young women and married women in their motherhood in terms of man-woman relationships, sociocultural views and religious concepts. In addition to the context, the purpose and explanation of the literary devices is included in the relevant sections of the essay. The arguments are fully supported by quotations from the two literary works and refuted with proper historical knowledge in appropriate places. Mainly only the characters in the chosen short stories are analyzed and explored, however for some of the stories, additional characters are taken into consideration. The purpose of this work is to investigate how women are portrayed in two diverse cultures with the aforementioned circumstances.

The extended essay is composed of an introduction, main body and conclusion. In the main body, James Joyce's *Dubliners* and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* is evaluated and analyzed. The two literary works are compared within their own historical and cultural context. While analyzing the short stories, a pattern of the development and growth of a woman is displayed by initially capturing a young teenage girl's story to focusing on a married mother. Furthermore, in the comparison paragraph, the scope of the two authors and how much they depart from historical context is taken into account.

In the conclusion of the essay, the roles of women in both Irish and American cultures are reflected upon and the authors' own interpretations, thoughts and attitudes towards women are successfully revealed with their unique writing styles.

Word Count: 265

## Introduction

The beginning of the twentieth century for both Ireland and the United States was an arduous and arousing time when both countries' conditions are taken into account. Up until 1916, Ireland was striving for their independence and this exhausting endeavor was clearly noticed in Ireland's capital, Dublin. As for America, in 1919, World War One had ended, families were recovering and at that point only peace and improvement were desired. As regards to the role of women in both Ireland and America, there was still a noticeable difference between man and woman and their positions in the public eye. Women were perceived in two categories. The first category being young women in their teenage or young adulthood years before getting married and the second one being married women undertaking the duty of constructing a family, and afterwards having the responsibility of the burden of motherhood for the rest of their lives. Both of these categories of women were shaped by the society they lived in, the social classes that they were born and raised in and the religion that continuously overlayed their whole family. The portrayal of women was continuously influenced by religious beliefs and therefore affected their role in society.

In James Joyce's *Dubliners*, women from varying social classes are displayed. Women who took upon the duty of motherhood, but at the same time, attempted pursuing a business were more present in higher social classes, while young women who struggle with abuse and lack of respect is further noticed in lower social classes. In Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, the role of young women was discerned as finding a man to marry. As all the short stories took place in small isolated towns, regardless of social class differences, the women were either destined to find a husband and become a defeated wife or to nurture a child. A woman figure with a determined, independent and reckless character was scarcely endured in a society where

man was constantly superior to woman. In order for a woman to gain respect and be accepted by society, she must constantly revolt against injustice. James Joyce's *Dubliners*, a collection of fifteen short stories, published in 1914 and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, a collection of twenty two short stories, written in 1919, both portray women and their duties based upon the distinct cultural backgrounds of Ireland and America in a time of period where men beheld all privileges and women were the victims of a male domineering society.

James Joyce portrays a young unwed woman as a restless, suppressed and despondent figure in the short story "Eveline" due to two factors: gender inequality and discrimination. The male figure is recognized as the superior one and as a result of this superiority, the young insecure women need a source of protection. Regarding the female protagonist of the story, Eveline Hills, is a nineteen year old woman with a life span of a middle aged woman "She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. Her head leaned against the window curtains and in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne. " (Joyce 29) Due to how a young woman is portrayed in society and the roles a young woman has to endure, she has been morally exhausted. A nineteen year old woman imprisoned indoors, indicates that the domineering factor has infringed her life. In order to express Eveline's feelings, ideas and frustrations, Joyce uses a third person point of view which is also referred to as free indirect discourse. Although the protagonist is Eveline, she is not directly allowed to make herself heard to the reader. Therefore, Eveline is not only withdrawn from society but additionally is restrained from the reader. Because of the lack of first person point of view, the reader isn't able to fully correlate with Eveline's thoughts and feelings. Thus, Joyce's specific literary techniques emphasize how young unwed women are portrayed in society.

The domineering male figure that holds Eveline back is her father. “When they were growing up he had never gone for her, like he used to go for Harry and Ernest, because she was a girl; but latterly he had begun to threaten her...” (Joyce 30) The inequality between the two genders and lack of respect to the female gender are imposed on Eveline at an early age which is shown by her lacking independence and the youthfulness a normal nineteen year old would have. This suppression implied by the father gives her the role and responsibility of taking care of him and carrying out the duties that a mother would. Additionally, the fact that a young woman requires protection by her two brothers from her father, emphasizes that the violence in a family against the girl is what causes the gender discrimination in society. “Then she would be married – she, Eveline. People would treat her with respect then.” (Joyce 30) Eveline, achieves her purpose as a young teenager, by means of meeting her male figure that cares and protects her against the suppressions present in society. However, for a young lady living in a lower social class who has to cope with insults and duties, marriage might not be the infinite escape. Thus, two outcomes can be deduced regarding the position and duties that a young woman has in society. Marriage is a necessity for a young woman in order for her to shelter herself against violence in society. If not, she will have to live under a burden of responsibilities and duties to her family.

Joyce presents a married woman with the responsibilities of motherhood and a young teenage daughter who is in a similar situation as Eveline Hills. Both characters have to endure the society’s oppressions due to patriarchy of the community. In a restrictive society, a mother is expected to carry out the certain stereotypical responsibilities; however, Joyce defies the stereotypical mindset and instead displays the mother as a dominant figure. “Mrs. Mooney was a butcher’s daughter. She was a woman who was quite able to keep things to herself: a determined

woman... and opened a butcher's shop..." (Joyce, 56). Although Mrs. Mooney manages to keep a solid grip by herself, she is from a family with a firm social background. Undoubtedly, she is more respected and is able to run her own business. According to the Irish culture, motherhood, is a well-respected and significant duty. However, for Mrs. Mooney, the boarding house and motherhood is a concept of business. According to Mrs. Mooney, manipulating Mr. Doran into marriage and an undesirable life is an accomplishment. Therefore, Mr. Doran being forced to marry Polly can be considered an act of victimization. Generally, Polly is victimized because she is a young, unwed vulnerable woman. The fact that she is not aware of her surroundings and the mentality of a man's mind, makes her to be the fool and victim.

Based on Joyce's use of language and writing style, the way Mrs. Mooney perceives motherhood as a business and Polly disobeys the belief of being virginal and emulating the Virgin Mary can be understood in a clear manner. "She dealt with moral problems as a cleaver deals with meat..." (Joyce, 58) The metaphor Joyce creates represents Mrs. Mooney's perspective towards life and indicates that she will be cutting and sharp in her dealings. The cleaver represents her inner self and the meat is the unfortunate consequences in her life. "I'm a ... naughty girl. You needn't sham: You know I am." (Joyce, 57) The interpretation of the improper songs Polly sings for the men indicates that she defies the responsibility a normal teenager has towards religion. The image imposed on Polly is impure and tainted. Joyce's description of Polly as "a little perverse madonna" indicates that she is to be victimized by the men in the boarding house. However, with her concern of finding a husband by being a "perverse madonna", she is accepting losing her honor and reputation. Nevertheless, Joyce uses various perspectives to keep the reader unbiased and distinguishes who has been victimized. From Mrs. Mooney's point of view, the reader can grasp her lifestyle; from Polly's point of

view, her acts of disobedience towards religion. Additionally, from Mr. Doran's point of view, the reader can understand man's weaknesses. Hence, occasionally in a woman's life, marriage and the burdens of motherhood can revive her from being victimized in society. On the contrary, vulnerability will always be a weak point. A man's weakness is based upon his sexual desires. If man is successful at masking his feelings, he will be able to escape from the trap, however, especially if a woman senses such acts, man will be the one fooled. Therefore, a young woman's most important duty is to be conscious of her surroundings in order to not be fooled and follow her holy beliefs for her dignity and honor.

In the story, "A Mother", James Joyce captures another strong-willed married mother figure who accepts all responsibilities and confronts all challenges in order for her daughter to fully live her life. However, Mrs. Kearney is unable to focus on her own desires because she is subdued by the immodest and pompous male figures that purposely create conflict since she is a woman trying to achieve success for her daughter. This gruesome act of gender discrimination emphasizes the unjust and improper acts males can display while still escaping from their own faults. In the beginning of the story, Joyce continues to defy the stereotypical woman figure. "She had been educated in a high class convent where she had learned French and music." (Joyce, 134). Joyce establishes a mother figure who is well-educated, has good manners and has achieved the duty of establishing a family with healthy relationships. Additionally, she completes her role by educating her daughter and introducing different opportunities to her. While fulfilling her religious obligations and taking into account her political point of view, Mrs. Kearney became a strong supporter of the Irish Revival language movement. Due to the fact that she is married, has a position in a middle to high social class and is educated, she gains respect and acceptance in society. "They thought they had only a girl to deal with and that, therefore,



they could ride roughshod over her. But she would show them their mistake. They wouldn't dared to treat her like that if she had been a man." (Joyce, 146). Although she possesses such values in the community, she still cannot compete with the superiority of man. The two pretentious male figures, Mr. Holohan and Mr. Fitzpatrick, symbolize the thickheaded part of society where no privileges or rights are given to the female gender because of man's indispensable mindset. In contrast to a naive and vulnerable girl, a mother can withstand the opposition from the male gender. "I am asking for my rights, she said... I thought you were a lady, said Mr Holohan." (Joyce, 147). Likewise an ignorant man perceives an opposing woman as a highly disrespectful and snobbish act, since women are considered inferior to men. Joyce emphasizes the true duty of motherhood as always defending her child's rights and privileges even before her own.

Joyce's paralysis technique is clearly recognized in the short story, "Mother", through Mrs. Kearney's perspective. Her determination and desire of success regarding Kathleen's music career ends with her being defeated by the omnipotent power. However, the significant point is that due to this defeat she becomes paralyzed and therefore is unable to break this barrier. Joyce describes the paralysis by defining Mrs. Kearney's state of mind with imagery. "She stood still for an instant like an angry stone image..." (Joyce, 147). Since she is unsuccessful at achieving her desires and is unable to change the situation, her anger and frustration causes her to convert from a dynamic figure into a hard and stable stone-like figure. Therefore, Joyce's use of language and writing style successfully reflects on the characters, the mode of the story and society.

Sherwood Anderson portrays a young unwed woman as a fragile and powerless figure that suffers from inner conflicts, isolation and loneliness in a society where man is superior to

woman. In the short story, "Surrender", Anderson analyzes the devaluation of women in society and how one's vulnerability, intimacy and spirituality is taken out of their lives by man's sexual desires. Anderson best depicts the suffering of a young woman from Louise Bentley's perspective towards life. Louise Bentley develops a corrupted mentality from an early age since the concept of affection and love was never presented to her by a male figure. "Born of a delicate and overworked mother, and an impulsive, hard, imaginative father, who did not look with favor upon her coming into the world, Louise was from childhood a neurotic..." (Anderson, 36). She was raised in a family that belongs in a high social class. However, because of a gender-discriminating father, she was born into a family with hatred, conflicts and lack of love. If a child lives in such a family, where a father doesn't appreciate his own girl's existence, an innocent childhood turns into a neurotic and unhealthy one. "Louise tried to make her husband understand the vague and intangible hunger that had led to the writing of the note...filled with his own notions of love between men and women, he did not listen but began to kiss her upon the lips." (Anderson, 40). Louise Bentley's purpose in marrying Tom Hardy is for affection, but Tom Hardy's purpose is for his own sexual longings. From a woman's perspective, marriage is considered to be a concept that provides them with affection and tenderness. However, from a man's perspective, marriage is a duty women must undertake by fulfilling man's sexual desires. Therefore, in a patriarchal society, marriage is the unfortunate duty women must accept. A woman who desires affection, eventually surrenders to man's ideologies and has to live a meaningless and despondent life.

Anderson begins with foreshadowing the fact that Louise Bentley's life is built upon a major misunderstanding. "The story of Louise Bentley... is a story of misunderstanding" (Anderson, 36). It is revealed that Louise and her husband's marriage is miserable and

devastating. With the foreshadowing of Louise Bentley's life, Anderson creates a desolate and hopeless mood for women. Anderson corrupts a woman's mentality and life by withholding affection and intimacy. Additionally, he reflects this corruption in society. Louise Bentley, the protagonist, is a representation of women that can't reach their aspirations and instead are dragged into unhappy marriages. The title of the short story "Surrender" must be considered since a connection can be made between the title and the consequences of Louise Bentley. In the end of the story, Louise Bentley surrenders by accepting her patriarchal marriage with Tom Hardy. Therefore, by naming the story "Surrender", Anderson foreshadows the unfortunate role of women.

Anderson continues presenting a negative perspective of women and specifically highlights a distraught mother's life, the unjust acts that she has to cope with and the duties she has to fulfill for her family and marriage. Upon entering motherhood, a woman loses her position, dignity and respect in society once her duties are complete. In a family where the woman is constantly subdued, as a woman ages, there is less of a possibility that man will behave respectfully. In the story, "Mother", Elizabeth Willard, the defeated mother is the victim of man's imprudent and violent acts. "He had always thought of himself as a successful man, although nothing that he had done had turned out successfully... had no fear of coming upon his wife, he swaggered and began to dramatize himself as one of the chief men of the town... You're not a fool and you're not a woman." (Anderson, 12). Tom Willard, the man who acts merely respectful, shows no affection to Elizabeth, and instead boasts about himself and portrays man with no fault. Because of this pureness, man is seen more superior to woman and this view influences man's acts and behavior, giving him the privilege of abusing his wife. Thus, women's role is obtaining small outbursts of determination and excitement to gain dignity. "A definite

determination had come into the mind of the defeated wife of the Winesburg hotel keeper. The determination was the result of long years of quiet and rather ineffectual thinking... There is something threatening my boy and I will ward it off.” (Anderson, 13). As for Elizabeth, she obtains this strong feeling and sensation of determination to defend her son. This instinctive motherly act of Elizabeth further emphasizes the role of motherhood, by protecting your own child against all odds. However, this sudden outburst of determination is additionally caused by the youthful days when the potential of change was present. “There was an uneasy desire for change, for some big definite movement to her life.” (Anderson, 13). Likewise, Elizabeth, in her girlhood, had a shaky reputation in Winesburg. This indicates that although a young woman’s role in society is marriage, a young woman possesses the potential to oppose the patriarchal society and attain her own thoughts and ideas.

While observing Main Street and Abner Groff’s Bakery from the window, Elizabeth Willard symbolizes a woman’s wasted life, the desire that one has to escape from the small Western town and the epiphany. “Once when she was alone, and after watching the prolonged and ineffectual outburst on the part of the baker, Elizabeth Willard put her head on her long white hands and wept” (Anderson, 11) Elizabeth Willard is aware that her life revolves similarly to the baker’s struggle in life and hence her outburst of sorrow. Anderson also reflects the misery to both Elizabeth’s and the hotel’s description. “Gaunt and her face was marked with smallpox scars...disorderly old hotel looking at the faded wall-paper and the ragged carpets...” (Anderson, 10) The hotel personifies Elizabeth; its old and cluttered state represents the overwhelmed state of a woman.

In the short story, “Death”, Anderson incorporates Elizabeth Willard from the short story “Mother” by portraying both her youthful days before marriage and her remaining days as a

married woman. Winesburg is a small rural town where many of the men are unable to accept a woman's affection and respect. Therefore, the most significant feelings and emotions a woman has is destroyed by man which causes man-woman relationships and marriages to fail. However, Anderson includes a male figure who is aware of a woman's vulnerability and respectability. Doctor Reefy and Elizabeth's communication symbolizes hope for the future and that the small rural town's mentality can change. As for Elizabeth, the reader encounters her desires and determination of her youth in the dialogues between the two characters. "In her girlhood and young womanhood Elizabeth had tried to be a real adventurer in life. At eighteen life, had so gripped her that she was no longer a virgin but...she had never entered upon an adventure prompted by desire alone." (Anderson, 110). Similarly to Louise Bentley, Elizabeth represents women that oppose the norms and the overall portrayal of women in a small town. The adventures she desires portray the hidden power a woman acquires and in Elizabeth's case, her desired adventure is a new life. "I wanted to get out of town, out of my clothes, out of my marriage, out of my body, out of everything." (Anderson, 111) Elizabeth's desire defies the stereotypical perception of a woman in a small town. Gaining independence is an ideology that is mostly forbidden to women since women are recognized as weak and powerless and whose sole purpose is to serve man's needs. Additionally, Elizabeth is rejected by the mentality of the society and is destined to marry Tom Willard. Since Tom Willard is one of the grotesque figures that Anderson describes in the beginning of the collection, he distinguishes Elizabeth as a sexual object and as someone to fulfill man's needs. The dialogues that Anderson interprets guide the reader to relate with Elizabeth's life and the struggles women must undertake in a small town. Doctor Reefy symbolizes the future and the alteration that will take place in the mentality of a corrupted small town and the perception of women. He is the only individual that

emphasizes with a woman's pain but also recognizes her beauty. Additionally, the title "Death" and the consequences that occur throughout the plot must be taken into consideration. Although death is usually recognized as a pessimistic occurrence, Anderson's interpretation of death is to raise awareness of the consequences that occur to women if a change doesn't take place. For Elizabeth, death is her only lover that can rescue her from her frustration and loneliness. For Anderson, Elizabeth's death symbolizes the death of a society.

James Joyce's *Dubliners* published in 1914 and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* published in 1919 both carry significant similarities and differences which make both works alluring since they were written in the same time period but in different settings. The attitude towards a young unmarried woman is disgraceful in both America and Ireland. In the early twentieth century since man was mainly seen as a more dominant figure than woman, society expected young women to marry for their own protection. Therefore, in both *Dubliners* and *Winesburg, Ohio*, regardless of the different settings, marriage was a necessity for young women. Marriage also affords young woman respect and dignity. Notably in lower social classes where violence is present and little to no respect or worth is shown to women, marriage was a way of escape. Such social class differences can be noticed more so in Joyce's *Dubliners* rather than Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. However, in the short stories "Mother" and "Death" from *Winesburg, Ohio* marriage may also be considered as a sacrifice of life since no marriage is actually composed of love. Thus, a young unwed woman's role must comply with the expectations of society along with maintaining her safety physically and mentally. When a woman's duties after marriage and motherhood are taken into consideration, the setting is significant in determining women's roles. For instance, in *Dubliners*, because of the heavy influence of religion, motherhood is witnessed as a holy and paramount role since the mother

nurtures the child and forms the family. Therefore, after marriage a woman who enters motherhood, holds a special place in society. Although motherhood introduces a few privileges, women cannot outrun men in the race of superiority. On the contrary, in *Winesburg, Ohio*, since most women suffer from a lack of love and affection, women entering motherhood will likely experience difficulty in expressing affection to a child. Thus, as it is depicted in *Winesburg, Ohio*, both the parent's relationship and the mother-child bond is poor and corrupted.

### **Conclusion:**

Throughout the twentieth century, women's rights were in a constant development process which was directly proportional to the roles and expectations of women in society. However, the movement of women's rights were not the only factor affecting the various duties a woman had to take upon herself. The dominance of man, the social class a woman is born and raised in and a woman's marital status can have major influences on a woman's destined life path. Additionally with the distinct cultural backgrounds of Ireland and America, the way James Joyce portrays women and their roles is comparatively more discrete than how Sherwood Anderson depicts women and their duties.

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